

STUDYING ERNESTO BOZZANO: SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE HISTORICAL STUDIES¹

by CARLOS S. ALVARADO

ABSTRACT

Ernesto Bozzano (1862–1943) was an important figure in the history of Italian studies of psychic phenomena. He was known in his lifetime for his bibliographical studies of psychic phenomena, as well as for his defences of survival of death, and his polemics with those that opposed spiritualistic interpretations of the psychic. Bozzano has received much attention in Italy. Nonetheless I believe more work could be done to understand him better, which is the topic of this paper. Several suggestions are presented for possible future studies. These are investigations of Bozzano's (1) personal and intellectual development; (2) discussions of specific areas and phenomena; (3) concepts and theories; (4) use of rhetoric; (5) analytical method; and (6) reception. Work along these lines will not only contribute to our knowledge of Bozzano, but will also increase our understanding of the history of psychical research and spiritualism in Italy and in Europe in general.

INTRODUCTION

The authors of two important reference works have referred to the “dean of Italian psychical researchers and spiritualists” (Fodor, n.d., p.36) and to a “naturalist for spiritism” (Biondi, 1988, p.165).² These were references to Ernesto Bozzano, an Italian student of psychic phenomena who may not be well known to many today, but was important in Italy and in other parts of Europe in his own time. In this article I will be concerned with the historical study of Bozzano, as opposed to discussing the validity and evidentiality of his work. I would like to suggest some areas and topics that may profitably be followed to increase our knowledge of Bozzano's life and work.

THE WORK OF ERNESTO BOZZANO

Ernesto Bozzano (1862–1943), who was born (and died) in Genoa, was a self-educated man who became well known for his prolific writings about psychic phenomena. He delved into the literature of spiritualism and psychical research during the 1890s and became convinced of the reality of psychic phenomena and certain that they indicated both the existence of a spiritual component in humankind as well as survival of bodily death. Such perspectives are clear in his first book (Bozzano, 1903), in which he reported séances he had with medium Eusapia Palladino and in which he criticized explanations of mediumship in terms of automatisms and secondary personalities of purely psychological origin.³ But in spite of his séances with mediums, Bozzano was

¹ This is a slightly modified version of a paper originally published in Italian in an issue of *Luce e Ombra* dedicated to commemorating the 150th anniversary of Bozzano's birth (Alvarado, 2012a).

² This, and other translations, are mine.

³ Bozzano was reacting to a trend in the study of dissociation and of the subconscious mind to reduce mediumship to psychological processes (e.g. Flournoy, 1899; Janet, 1889). For overviews see Alvarado (2010, in press b).

basically a theoretical student of psychic phenomena. Most of his work was based on analyses of published cases.

Bozzano is important for the history of psychical research for many reasons. First of all, he is an excellent representative of the bibliographic approach to the study of psychic phenomena, based on the use of published descriptions to reach conclusions about their features and nature. This was seen in his studies of deathbed phenomena (Bozzano, 1923b), telepathy (Bozzano, 1933a), hauntings (Bozzano, 1936) and clairvoyance (Bozzano, 1942), among many other manifestations (e.g. Bozzano, 1909–1910, 1912–1913, 1934, 1934/1937). The same may be said about studies of topics such as phenomena reported by ‘primitive’ people (Bozzano, 1941). His analyses were based on published cases which he classified into various types. In addition, Bozzano is important for the historian of psychical research to illustrate several issues and positions, since he was very passionate in defending his ideas. This included his affirmation that a systematic examination of various forms of psychic phenomena presented convergent proof of survival of death (e.g. Bozzano, n.d.). Reflecting this belief in survival, he affirmed in one of his publications: “the fact is that after sixty years of struggles and attacks, the spiritist hypothesis, far from showing weakness or defeat . . . appears like a lighthouse pointing to the port for sailors who are lost in the ocean of life” (Bozzano, 1909–1910, p.308). Bozzano was also well known for his controversies with others who did not accept survival (e.g. Bozzano, 1926/1927), and for his discussions of psychic phenomena as independent of biological evolution (e.g. Bozzano, 1923a). All of this not only impinges on topics and standards of evidence in the examination of psychic phenomena in Europe, but it also involves many people who were active psychical researchers at the time.

In the past our historical knowledge of Bozzano depended on short accounts of him (e.g. De Boni, 1941; Di Porto, 1971). But later scholarship has considerably increased this knowledge. A pioneering study—and one that corrected misconceptions and used Bozzano’s correspondence in detail for the first time—was Giovanni Iannuzzo’s *Ernesto Bozzano: La Vita e l’Opera* (1983b). This was followed, and extended in some aspects, by Silvio Ravaldini’s *Ernesto Bozzano e la Ricerca Psichica: Vita e Opere di un Pioniere della Parapsicologia* (1993), and even more by Luca Gasperini’s unpublished thesis *Ernesto Bozzano: Tra Spiritismo Scientifico e la Ricerca Psichica* (2009–2010). Gasperini has published some of his work in recent articles (e.g. Gasperini, 2010, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c, 2012b). In addition Bozzano has been discussed in a history of Italian spiritism and psychical research (Biondi, 1988, pp.165–169). Other writings include a variety of essays (e.g. Biondi, 1984, 2010; Cugnaschi, 2002; De Boni, 1982; Iannuzzo, 1982, 1983a; Ravaldini, 1983; Siegel & Hirschman, 1983). Much of my own work has been an attempt to make Bozzano better known to the English-language world (e.g. Alvarado, 1987, 2000, 2005, 2007, in press a).⁴

⁴ Several papers about Bozzano were recently published in *Luce e Ombra*. Some papers were about Bozzano’s writings about physical phenomena related to death (Biondi, 2012), hauntings and poltergeists (Caratelli, 2012), communications received via mediums describing the experience of death (Gasperini, 2012c), and psychometry (Ravaldini, 2012). For a bibliography of modern discussions about Bozzano see Gasperini (2012a).

The issue before us is what further work may be carried out to continue to improve our knowledge of Bozzano, and through him, aspects of European psychical research. The following are some suggestions for possible future historical explorations.

STUDYING BOZZANO

Bozzano's Personal and Intellectual Development

Iannuzzo (1983b) and Ravaldini (1993) have already provided much information about Bozzano's personal life. But I wonder if there might be any information to expand some aspects of this. One topic of further exploration could be Bozzano's relationship with his brother Adolfo, who supported him for many years and provided him with a comfortable and spacious place to live in his villa in Savona. Did he support Bozzano only because he was his brother or also because he believed in the importance of psychic studies?

For a period of about 20 years after moving to the villa Bozzano dedicated most of his life to reading, writing articles and books, and keeping up a voluminous correspondence. At the villa Bozzano published more than he had ever done before. Regardless of the fact that he had acquired more experience by that time, his increased production bears witness to the obvious importance of material resources for scholarly work.

There is also more to be done concerning the influence of various thinkers on Bozzano. This could include Bozzano's statement that he was influenced by reading material and advice provided by French psychologist Théodule Ribot (Bozzano, 1924, pp.153–154). Bozzano (n.d., p.1) himself mentioned that he had been deeply interested in the ideas of Herbert Spencer⁵ to the point that he had become his idol, a topic that has been explored by Iannuzzo (1983b) and Gasperini (2012d). Iannuzzo has stated that Spencer "had a decisive importance in the evolution of his [Bozzano's] thinking" (Iannuzzo, 1983b, p.15), and both he and Gasperini have speculated on the importance of Spencer's ideas for inspiring Bozzano's empirical approach to psychic phenomena (in the sense of collecting cases) and for thinking that science could explore the manifestations of what Spencer referred to as the "unknowable" (Spencer, 1870, Part I).

But the question is, can we, through a close study of Bozzano's writings, find traces of Spencer's influence? Gasperini (2012d) has pointed out places in Bozzano's copies of Spencer's books in which he made markings around certain passages. In addition to this we need to have studies with analyses of Bozzano's writings providing examples about various forms of influence and to see how he cited Spencer. The following is an example of the latter:—

Nevertheless, even today and at a distance of three decades, as far as my way of thinking has changed, the wonderful philosophical system of Herbert Spencer is still—in its main lines—as unshakably true before the criterion of reason. It is not that the feeling of dissatisfaction and emptiness that such a reading left in my mind has finally been dispelled. It is that now, more than before, I feel my mind permeated by a very clear and comprehensive summary of the system, and then understand and appreciate the supreme wisdom of those who, like Herbert Spencer, intending to cast the foundations of a great system of positive philosophy, and then feeling compelled to exclude any speculation of a more or less metaphysical nature, nevertheless know to give a

⁵ On Spencer see Francis (2007) and Offer (2000).

place of honour to the inherent problems of the being postulating them as the basis of his own conception of the theory of the Unknowable. [Bozzano, 1903, p. 401]

In Bozzano's view, if instead of "unknowable" the word "God" was used, Spencer's system would not change. As Bozzano wrote: "The agnosticism of Herbert Spencer is the vestibule to the Temple of God" (p.401).

Similarly, I would be interested in assessments of how Bozzano was influenced by other students of psychic phenomena. Some possibilities for further studies are the authors mentioned by his disciple, physician Gastone De Boni, and the books he said Bozzano acquired during his early years, which De Boni (1982, p.10) believed influenced him greatly. Among these works were *From Matter to Spirit* (De Morgan, 1863) and *The Debatable Land Between this World and the Next* (Owen, 1871).

It is clear from his writings about animism and spiritism (e.g. Bozzano, 1903, n.d) that he was directly influenced by Russian student of psychic phenomena, Alexander Aksakov, whom Bozzano probably read in French (Aksakof, 1890/1895). Furthermore, my impression is that Bozzano was influenced by Frederic W. H. Myers more than has been recognized. For example, in his first book Bozzano (1903) mentioned Myers's ideas about the subliminal self in the context of disagreeing with ideas of dissociation to explain mediumship. He wrote:—

I will confine myself . . . to . . . the seriousness of the theory proposed by Myers, which, in fact, given the irrefutable existence of the phenomena on which it is based, it is to be logically constrained . . . to be admitted. This theory, on the other hand, had already been wonderfully intuited by Neoplatonic philosophers. [p.316]

In another publication Bozzano (1906) rejected evolutionary explanations to account for psychic phenomena. He accepted Myers's conception of a subliminal self "which reasserts itself in its plenitude after the liberating change of death" (Myers, 1903, Vol. 1, p. 12). Furthermore, Bozzano followed Myers's belief in the existence of "a fundamental transition from organic to spiritual faculties;—from powers developed by natural selection on Earth, and exercised through the material organism, to powers derived from the metetherial world, and exercised in spite of—rather than by aid of—the material organism" (Myers, 1903, Vol. 1, pp.487–488). Bozzano stated in his article that his analysis, done differently from Myers's, led him to the same conclusions. In his view, his conviction that subconscious faculties were not affected by evolutionary processes "renders inevitable a recurrence to the theory propounded by Myers, as the only one capable of furnishing a comprehensive and rational explanation of the facts" (Bozzano, 1906, p. 169).

Specific Phenomena and Areas Discussed by Bozzano

In the second part of his book, Ravaldini (1993) has chapters about Bozzano's work covering various phenomena and topics, among them materializations, xenoglossy, and mediumistically-produced literature. Later writers have focused on other phenomena (Alvarado, 2005, 2007; Biondi, 2010; Siegel & Hirschman, 1983; see also the references in footnote 4). But Bozzano discussed so many phenomena that there is room for further studies. This could include veridical mediumistic and apparitional manifestations (Bozzano, 1909–1910), premonitions (Bozzano, 1912–1913), the different ways in which thought and will can create reality (such as materializations and thought-photographic

effects, Bozzano, 1929), 'transfiguration' (Bozzano, 1934), and hauntings (Bozzano, 1936), among others.

New studies of Bozzano could explore his contributions in terms of the classifications of phenomena that he created, something that also reflects how he saw the phenomena. An example is his classification of the different types of premonitions, as seen in Table 1.

Table 1

Bozzano's (1947a) Classification of Premonitions

I. Self-Premonitions of Infirmary or Death

- A. Infirmary
- B. Short-Term Death due to Natural Causes
- C. Long-Term Death due to Natural Causes
- D. Death due to Accidental Causes

II. Premonitions of Infirmary and of Death About Other Persons

- E. Infirmary Affecting Others
- F. Short-Term Death of Others due to Natural Causes
- G. Long-Term Death of Others due to Natural Causes
- H. Short-Term Death of Others due to Accidental Causes
- I. Long Term Death of Others due to Accidental Causes
- J. Recurrent Deaths Usually in a Family

III. Premonitions of Various Events

- K. Important Events Not Related to Death
 - L. Insignificant Events Lacking Practical Utility
 - M. Meteorological and Seismic Events
 - N. Protective
 - O. Those which Determine the Fulfillment of the Event
 - P. Those which Present Theoretically Important Elements
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Another example was his classification of deathbed visions, in which he outlined six types of manifestations (Bozzano, 1923b). These consisted of visions of persons who: (1) were known to have died and that were perceived only by the dying person; (2) were not known to have died and were perceived only by the dying person; (3) were perceived by the dying person and also by those around him or her; (4) were related to information conveyed by mediums; (5) were perceived only by people related to the moribund who were close or around the bed. In addition, Bozzano included a group of cases that strictly speaking were not deathbed visions. These were apparitions seen some time after death in the same house as had contained the body of the dead person.

But Bozzano could also be studied as a pioneer in the investigation of phenomena that were rarely discussed systematically, such as those visions reported by people around dying persons consisting of observations of lights, nebulous forms, or replicas of the body of the dying person leaving their bodies which he discussed in works such as *Phénomènes psychiques au moment de la mort*

(1923b) and *Les phénomènes de bilocation* (1934/1937). Bozzano (ibid, p.120) referred to these phenomena as “embryonic or rudimentary” doubling, which represented the “initial phase of ‘deathbed bilocation’ phenomena.” Other examples of Bozzano’s examination of phenomena that were rarely discussed systematically are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Examples of Bozzano’s Studies of Neglected Phenomena and Topics

Symbols and Psychic Phenomena (Bozzano, 1907)
Mediumistic Communications from Living Persons (Bozzano, 1925)
Xenoglossy (Bozzano, 1932)
Transfiguration with Mediums (Bozzano, 1934)
Panoramic Vision when Close to Death (Bozzano, 1933b, pp.51–97)
Burns and Impressions Caused by Spirit Hands (Bozzano, 1933b, pp.7–47)
Musical Manifestation with Mediums, Haunted Houses, in Deathbeds, and in other contexts (Bozzano, 1943)
Telekinetic Phenomena Related to Death (Bozzano, 1948)
Mediumistic Communications about the Experience of Death (Bozzano, 1952)

It is also possible, as Iannuzzo (1983a) has done in relation to survival of death, to study topics such as evolution and supernormal phenomena (Bozzano, 1906, 1923a), as well as the occurrence and importance of psychic phenomena in so-called ‘primitive’ people (Bozzano, 1941), a topic examined by Gasperini (2011a). Studies of these issues would increase our knowledge of Bozzano’s work and could put this work in the context of psychical research in general or ideas from other disciplines. Additionally, such studies could provide further insights into how Bozzano reacted to the views of his contemporaries who were writing and expressing opinions about psychic phenomena.

Bozzano on Concepts and Theories

It would be interesting to explore whether Bozzano’s ideas changed over time. For example, are there differences between his ideas in *Ipotesi Spiritica e Teoria Scientifica* (1903) and his later *Discarnate Influence in Human Life* (n.d.)? Did his ideas evolve in response to new information? If so, how did they change? Future studies could document the differences in these works and trace their origins.

We know that Bozzano revised some of his work so that later discussions of the same topic had more cases to support the argument than the earlier ones. In some cases, as in his writings about deathbed visions (e.g. Bozzano, 1923b, 1947b), the basic ideas in general were similar. But there were changes in his writings about ‘bilocation’.⁶ While his first major publication on the subject referred to the etheric body as the main principle behind the phenomenon

⁶ Bozzano (1911, 1934/1937, n.d.) used the term bilocation to refer to various phenomena (such as autoscapy, out-of-body experiences, and bystanders’ deathbed visions) in which he postulated that an etheric body left the physical one (see also Alvarado, 2005).

(Bozzano, 1911), later ones had the additional concept of an etheric brain (Bozzano, 1934/1937, n.d.). He wrote (n.d., pp. 142–143):—

It is in fact evident that the existence of an etheric body immanent in the somatic body takes for granted the existence of an etheric brain within the somatic brain. This admission would clear up at once all the perplexities which have always held back physiologists from admitting the existence of a spirit surviving the death of the body, which perplexities are summed up in the indubitable fact of the existence of a psycho-physiological parallelism in the phenomena of thought, leading inexorably to the conclusion that thought is a function of the brain. There is no doubt that the physiologists were apparently right in concluding this; but they would not be so if the terms of the formidable problem were inverted by the experimental demonstration of the existence of an etheric brain within the somatic brain; in which case the latter would be merely the indispensable apparatus for the translation of the impressions that come to it from the outer world by means of the senses in the form of *physical vibrations*, into terms of *psychic vibrations* perceptible to the spirit immanent in the etheric brain.

Previous writers (e.g. De Boni, 1982, p. 8; Iannuzzo, 1983b, p. 15) have made the point that during his early studies Bozzano read the writings of many philosophers. Another interesting line of study is the assessment of Bozzano's knowledge of physics, psychology and other disciplines. According to Gasperini (2012d), Bozzano was fascinated “with astronomy, geology, paleontology, physiology, but we have no precise confirmation of the works or the authors that he studied, except for a few hints about Darwin” (p. 224). However, Iannuzzo (1983b) has stated that Bozzano was not current in science, and that his education was from the 1800s, “based on the texts of Darwin and Heckel or, in any case, on scientific works of *fin de siècle*” (p. 83). In addition, Iannuzzo criticized Bozzano, arguing that in contradiction to attempts by some psychical researchers to bring information from other areas into the field, “Bozzano continued to work in the field of metapsychics in a completely autonomous way in terms of other scholars and other tendencies in psychical research” (p. 84).

This could be the focus of studies approaching from the historiography of science. An example is Holmes's (2004) idea of the “investigative pathway”, which shows the “expression of the distinctiveness and continuity of the individual scientific Personality” (p. xx), assumed to develop gradually with time.

While previous work has included discussions of some of the concepts that guided Bozzano's work and that were recurrent in his writings (e.g. Gasperini, 2009–2010; Iannuzzo, 1983b; Ravaldini, 1993), many of these topics deserve closer discussion and study. An example is the recurrent concept in Bozzano's writings about the common identity of psychic manifestations from the living and from the dead. He wrote (1926/1927, p. 42):—

Animism and spiritualism represent the double aspect with which the same phenomenon manifests, which derives from a single cause, which is the ‘human Spirit’ in its double phase of existence: ‘incarnate’ and ‘discarnate’.

Bozzano's Rhetoric

The study of rhetoric is an important part of science studies today,⁷ but has been neglected in studies of Bozzano. What did he do, other than presenting cases, to persuade his readers of his views? Can we identify specific metaphors

⁷ See, for example, the works of Cecarelli (2001), Fahnestock (1999), Gross, Harmon and Reidy (2002), and Myers (1990).

or analogies used by him in attempts to persuade others? Even his detailed presentations of case reports may be seen as a rhetorical device supporting his claim that facts talk by themselves, which would in turn undermine the idea that his theoretical explanations were as embedded in assumptions and in subjectivity as were those of his opponents. This idea, of course, needs further development.

As I have mentioned before, it is well known that Bozzano produced highly polemical writings countering anti-survival speculations, as documented recently by Gasperini (2010, 2011b). These included, but were not limited to, criticisms of French psychical researcher and popularizer of science René Sudre (Bozzano, 1926/1927). Here Bozzano replied to Sudre's attempts to explain survival-related phenomena in purely psychological terms or as the psychic powers of the living in his textbook, *Introduction à la métapsychique humaine* (Sudre, 1926).⁸

Following authors such as Ceccarelli (2001) it may be argued that texts like Bozzano's (1926/1927) are not attempts to foster scientific dialogue or consensus. They represent attempts to create controversy, demarcating positions more sharply in order to establish a particular theoretical model. Bozzano's arguments were sometimes a strategy by which he tried to overcome and discredit an opponent in order to uphold the survival model. This included questioning the competence of his opponents, as shown in the following statement about Sudre's (1926) mentality, which,

combined with a greatly partisan temperament, makes him very inferior to the task of investigating profitably metapsychic manifestations. His talent is of a different nature, and he can gather laurels dedicating himself to journalism, literature, theatre, but in the field of metapsychics he will only hamper the work of others, disorienting the research and delaying the advent of Truth. [Bozzano, 1926/1927, p. 210]

Similarly, we find Bozzano criticising Eugène Osty (1874–1938) for his views of autoscapy and out-of body experiences as hallucinatory phenomena (Osty, 1930). After praising him for his work with clairvoyance (which by itself may be seen as a rhetorical device to show fairness in the critique), he dismissed the French researcher by stating that he was analysing phenomena located in a “metapsychic environment” which was out of his competence (Bozzano, 1934/1937, p. 60).

At first sight arguments like these may be seen as weapons used in discussions to defend opinions. But they could have fulfilled other functions, among them giving Bozzano more prominence. As stated by Nyhart (1991) in a different context, “by attacking someone else, a marginal scientist might be asserting his right to be heard, in part by presenting himself as having competence at least equal to the other person” (pp. 70–71). Further study of Bozzano's writings will help us to identify specific strategies he used to convey his message in his writings.

Bozzano's Analytical Methods

There have been many comments about Bozzano's analytic methods in some

⁸ Sudre, who was in charge of a section of the *Revue Métapsychique*, was eventually dismissed from his position seemingly because of his strong anti-spiritistic views (Evrard, 2009). Bozzano may have triggered this, but there were other political factors as well.

of the above-mentioned publications (e.g. Gasperini, 2011c; Iannuzzo, 1983b; Ravaldini, 1993). Referring to this, Biondi (1988, p.167) wrote:—

It consisted of dealing with a single issue in an article or book, one order of mediumistic phenomena, a single class of spontaneous events, reporting a series of examples, commenting briefly on them and presenting the result of all the subject matter. He organized the material in such a way as always to reach a prearranged conclusion, which was to demonstrate the possibility of (or better, the need for) the spiritist hypothesis. The finished work was material organized by classes, reordered in a progressive scale, as if it was the reconstruction of a tree in evolutionary lineage.

In addition to summarizing Bozzano's approach, Biondi suggests that he worked backwards. That is, that he started with a conviction and analysed his material to support it. This view, with which I agree, is a problem when only one person is analysing accounts, and something that underscores the subjectivity involved in analyses of narratives of different sorts, including the writing of history.

One line of further inquiry could be a comparison between Bozzano's bibliographic-classificatory approach and the work of contemporaries. Such comparisons could focus on different types of psychical researchers. This may include those known to rely mainly on bibliographical studies of psychic phenomena, such as P. Thomas Bret and Emil Mattiesen (e.g. Bret, 1927; Mattiesen, 1936–1939), and those taking a more empirical approach, among them Julian Ochorowicz and Albert von Schrenck-Notzing, well known for their investigations of topics such as physical mediumship (e.g. Ochorowicz, 1910; Schrenck-Notzing, 1920/1925). Certainly not every believer in survival of death followed the same approach Bozzano used. Interesting case studies could be conducted comparing the analytical styles of Bozzano with those of people such as James H. Hyslop and Oliver Lodge (e.g. Hyslop, 1919; Lodge, 1920).

Bozzano's approach was similar to Myers's. Myers also relied on bibliographic research in most of his work, in which he rearranged and reinterpreted other writers' work. Both were less empirical (in the sense of not engaging much in studying active cases and in experimenting) than their contemporaries. A somewhat similar example—and a contemporary of both Bozzano and Myers—was the above-mentioned Théodule Ribot, who was a main contributor to the development of empirical approaches in French psychology during the 1870s and 1880s (e.g. Ribot, 1879, 1888).⁹ It has been said that Ribot's "psychological works consisted of observations culled from the works of others—primarily physiologists and psychiatrists—and interpreted systematically from a biological and evolutionary point of view" (Brooks III, 1998, pp.67–68).

However, in my view Myers was orders of magnitude above Bozzano in terms of the depth and wide reach of his work. For one thing, Myers went much more deeply than Bozzano in his discussions and analysis of the psychological literature on topics such as automatisms, dreams, hypnosis and hysteria (Myers, 1903).

It would also be interesting to contrast Bozzano with others regarding what I have referred to as the "ensemble of psychic manifestations" (Alvarado, 2012b, p.46) in relation to the issue of non-physicality and survival of death. This is the idea that such concepts are better supported when several phenomena are

⁹ For discussions of Ribot see Brooks III (1998, Chapter 2), Guillin (2004), Nicolas and Murray (1999).

considered together, as opposed to a single one. Authors such as Mattiesen (1936–1939) and Myers (1903) followed this approach. But this is less evident, although not completely absent, in the work of others such as Oliver Lodge (1920).

Reception of Bozzano's Work

Another approach to the study of Bozzano is that suggested by the field of reception studies. This is a speciality in historical studies, including intellectual history and the history of science.¹⁰

On 4 November 1931 Bozzano wrote to Gastone De Boni that he was “considered abroad the greatest living scholar” in terms of ‘metapsychic’ matters (De Boni, 1974, p. 109). This claim, related to how Bozzano was received, deserves study. It is my impression that regard for Bozzano’s work came mainly from some European (particularly French and Italian) researchers, and then mainly from those who believed in survival of death. But there were exceptions, and I will comment on some of them in what follows.

Some non-spiritists cited Bozzano when referring to cases and to various aspects of psychical research. An example of a sceptic to most claims about psychic phenomena who did this was French physician Joseph Grasset (e.g. Grasset, 1908, pp. 313, 323, 326, 359). Bozzano was also cited many times in two comprehensive psychical research European treatises authored by non-survival-oriented authors, namely *Metapsichica Moderna* (Mackenzie, 1923) and *Introduction à la métapsychique humaine* (Sudre, 1926). A particularly prominent example of another treatise was French physiologist Charles Richet’s *Traité de métapsychique* (1922). While most of his citations in this book referred to cases collected by Bozzano in his works (e.g. pp. 141, 189, 269, 432), Richet also cited Bozzano’s opinions (e.g. pp. 221, 417, 440, 480). Regardless of their differences regarding survival (Gasperini, 2011b), Richet respected Bozzano. This is evident in the *Traité*, where Richet referred to Bozzano as “the psychologist to whom are due so many penetrating and shrewd studies on various issues of metapsychics (pp. 323–324). Furthermore, Richet also referred to one of Bozzano’s studies as follows: “like all the writings of Bozzano, this study deserves to be pondered (p. 703).¹¹ Clearly Richet valued Bozzano’s work, as did Italian psychiatrist Enrico Morselli, who disagreed with Bozzano theoretically (Gasperini, 2010). None the less Morselli wrote about Bozzano’s “solid and vast erudition” and stated that he was “unquestionably the most learned and authoritative of the connoisseurs of psychic studies in Italy” (Morselli, 1908, Vol. 1, p. xvi).¹² Can we document similar reactions from other writers?

Studies are also needed about how Bozzano was criticized by many, as seen in reviews in the *Revue métapsychique* (e.g. Quartier, 1927a, 1927b). Another example would be critics writing in the pages of the *Journal of the Society for*

¹⁰ For some examples of reception studies see Engels and Glick (2008), Krömer and Chin-Drian (2012), and Lieb, Mason, and Roberts (2011).

¹¹ It has been claimed that Bozzano’s writings were influential in converting Richet to a belief in survival of death (Bubb, 1936; Magalhães, 2007, Chapter 5), a topic that in my view is unclear (Alvarado, 2008; see also Gasperini, 2011b).

¹² Morselli also wrote that in his works Bozzano showed a “deep-rooted spiritistic conviction, but at the same time vast erudition, uncommon serious competence and dialectical ability” (Morselli, 1903, p. 399).

Psychical Research who commented on what they believed were Bozzano's low evidential standards. A reviewer of one of Bozzano's books commented that "he proceeds to classification with rather too easy an assumption that the existence of the genuine Poltergeist is an established fact" (Troubridge, 1919, p.108). Another critic commented about Bozzano's reports of physical mediumship séances reported in Hack's (1929) book as follows: "Signor Bozzano's reports do not in themselves merit serious attention on evidential grounds. They show an almost complete lack of understanding of what constitutes good evidence and adequate recording of mediumistic sittings" (Besterman, 1930, p.11). In addition, psychical researcher Herbert F. Saltmarsh stated about one of Bozzano's books:—

In his first chapter the author argues that the supernormal faculties of the subliminal mind are not the product of biological evolution and that the "integral subconscious personality is a spiritual entity independent of any functional interference, direct or indirect, from the brain." The reasoning employed appears to me to be weak, and I cannot see that the conclusion at which the author arrives is established thereby. In his second chapter he attempts to assign limits to subliminal faculty and cites cases in support of his argument. Here again I fail to see that he establishes his position. The alternative explanations which he brings forward for cases which appear to go against his theory rest, as it seems to me, on unproved assumptions . . . In my opinion the author would have made out a much stronger case if he had not tried to make it quite so strong. Much of the book's content is interesting and some is suggestive, but when it is claimed that the inferences drawn are "rigorously logical deductions from the facts" I feel bound to demur. [Saltmarsh, 1938, pp.277–278]

In Germany biologist Hans Driesch wrote that Bozzano was "one of our acutest theorists, but unfortunately far too slipshod in accepting alleged facts" (Driesch, 1932/1933, p.34, footnote). Another critic, Italian student of psychic phenomena Cesar de Vesme, referred to Bozzano's ideas of telepathy, pointing out his lack of experimentation and the problems of classificatory work:—

M. Bozzano, isolated in a little provincial village, where he is not able to experiment by himself nor to engage in verbal discussions from which one often gains the greatest profit, continues tirelessly his work of grouping and classification of supernormal cases in special monographs which, as a whole, are one of the most useful and precious monuments of metapsychic literature. But now, *classification!* This work unceasingly brings, quite naturally, to have to split a hair into four, as it is commonly said, by establishing subtle distinctions everywhere, by even imagining "phenomena of trans-itions" between one category and another, which points of demarcation do not appear absolute. [de Vesme, 1936, p.181]

Reception studies might include the various polemics Bozzano engaged in with other students of psychic phenomena, which reveal opinions about the validity of his work. As mentioned before, this has been discussed recently by Gasperini (2010, 2011b) in relation to Charles Richet and Enrico Morselli. Furthermore, these studies could be expanded to address the little attention Bozzano's work received in the English-language literature of his times, something that may be explained in part by the language barrier.¹³ Examples of

¹³ The language barrier may also account for the lack of discussions of Bozzano's work in modern times. This is evident in historical overviews of parapsychology (e.g. Beloff, 1993; Gutierrez & Maillard, 2005) and in writings about some of the areas and topics covered by Bozzano. This includes publications about survival of death (Braude, 2003), death-related physical phenomena (Rhine, 1963), deathbed

this include lack of citations of his work in general discussions of psychical research such as *On the Threshold of the Unseen* (Barrett, 1917), *On the Cosmic Relations* (Holt, 1914), *Enigmas of Psychical Research* (Hyslop, 1906), *Psychical Research for the Plain Man* (Kingsford, 1920), and *Practical Views on Psychic Phenomena* (Wright, 1920).¹⁴

Our reception studies could also be expanded to include reactions to Bozzano by individuals outside psychical research. An example of this is Gasperini's (2011a) study of anthropologist Ernesto de Martino's critique of Bozzano's (1941) writings about psychic phenomena among 'primitive' people.

Reception work is not only important for assessing how Bozzano was evaluated and how he affected others. These studies also allow us to use Bozzano as a window to understand better the various methodological and conceptual approaches prevalent in psychical research at the time.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In these comments I have briefly mentioned some topics deserving further and more detailed historical study in relation to Ernesto Bozzano. But there are other topics that may be explored further. Examples are attempts to disseminate Bozzano's work, such as De Boni's efforts in publishing revised versions of his teacher's work (e.g. Bozzano, 1942, 1947b), and the many translations of his work by spiritists in Brazil. It is my hope that this future work will be informed by approaches prevalent in such varied areas as social and intellectual history.

As I have said before, the previous work of the main Bozzano scholars (Gasperini, Iannuzzo and Ravaldini), has already given us much knowledge about the topic. In fact, their work is fundamental for understanding Bozzano, and it is required reading for those interested in conducting further studies. Unfortunately this work is little known outside Italy. I hope this may change in the future with translations of this work and of Bozzano's writings into English, a language that will allow a wider circulation of knowledge about him. This will not only increase our knowledge of Bozzano's work and of Italian psychic studies, but would also contribute to a more complete perspective of the history of psychical research.

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*Rhine Research Center, 2741 Campus Walk Avenue
Durham, NC 27705, U.S.A.*

Carlos@theazire.org

visions (Osis & Haraldsson, 1997), and panoramic memory (Stevenson & Cook, 1995). For recent citations of Bozzano see Gasperini (2012a).

¹⁴ Two exceptions were Doyle (1926, Vol. 2, p. 193) and Fodor (n.d.), who had an entry about Bozzano in his *Encyclopaedia of Psychic Science* (p. 36), and who mentioned Bozzano in other parts of his work (pp. 10, 16). See also the references by Bozzano cited by Lambert (1928, p. 49). Others mentioned Bozzano without specific references (e.g. Cross, 1939, pp. 74, 116, 121, 147). In his comprehensive textbook Holms (1925/1927, p. 251) mentioned Bozzano once, citing him from a secondary source in English.

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